

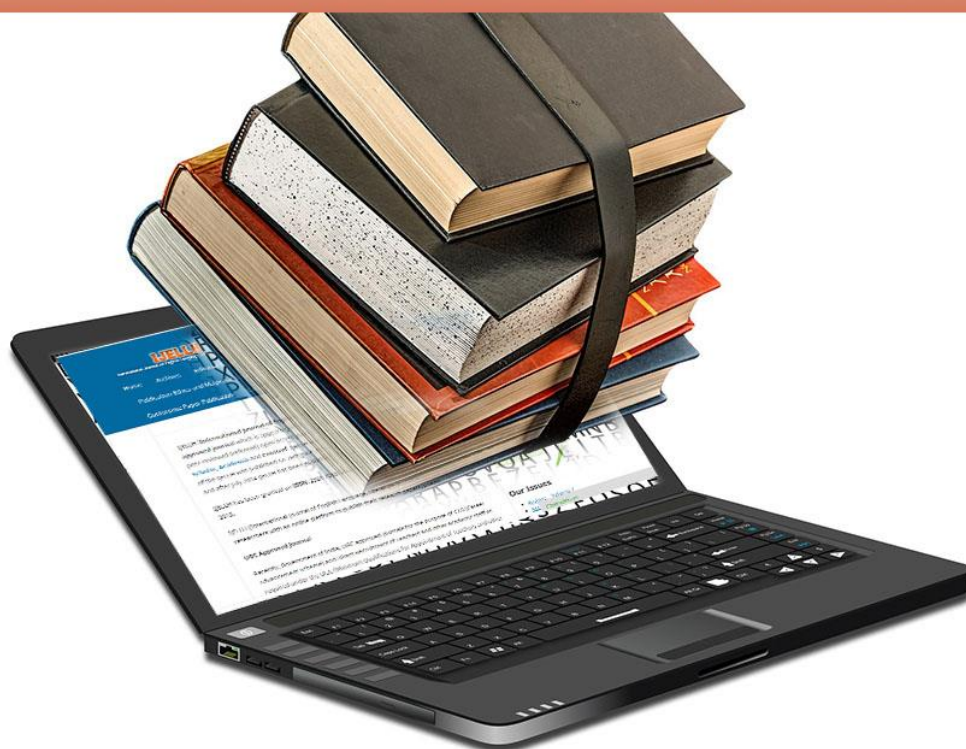
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**A sense of oscillation between ‘Home’ and ‘Unhomeliness’ in select  
novels of Amit Chaudhuri**

**Abstract**

People are continuously traumatized by many psychological forces. Therefore they are always in the quest for ‘Utopia,’ the perfection for everything and for better tomorrow. Due to this they often wander here and there-landing ultimately nowhere. So they keep oscillating by their psychological traumas between the two geographical territories- the native or the ancestral land ‘home’ and an unknown foreign land or ‘Unhomeliness’ ,a concept given by Homi K. Bhabha and other Post-Colonial theorists. The notion of ‘home ’plays a significant function in everyone’s life and gives a sense of belonging and indigenous space. ‘Unhomeliness,’ on the other hand emerges when one lives in a place which is not his or her real home and gives a sense of otherness, alienation, isolation, cross cultural conflicts, diasporic dilemmas and feeling of nostalgia. This paper attempts to analyse, from various theoretical points of view, considering Homi K. Bhabha’s and other Post-Colonial theorists’ Unhomeliness, Victor Shklovsky’s concept of ‘Defamiliarization’ and Diasporic dilemmas.

**Keywords:** Unhomeliness, Defamiliarization, Diasporic dilemmas and Nostalgia.

Amit Chaudhuri, a renowned writer of contemporary Indian English literature, is much acclaimed for his depiction of empirical view of modern India, especially Calcutta (now Kolkata). He has shown his craftsmanship in his novel 'A Strange and Sublime Address' (1991) when the narrator delineates the insignificant activities of everyday's happenings in a significant way:

“The two hours of golden stillness has ended. The cars and crowded buses were on the roads again; Abhi and Babla [the two cousin brothers of Sandeep] would come back home from school [for their school bus might have been halted in the traffic jam]; pigeons flapped their wings and rose above rooftops, a clean universe of rooftops and terraces” (Chaudhuri 81).

He has distinguished himself among most of his contemporaries in the sense that his fiction deals with the issues, neither related to the destiny of nations, nor with the matter of caste but with the matter of hybrid identity which is experimented to be the consequence of being caught between two different cultures. In spite of settling abroad, he keeps on shuttling physically as well as psychologically from that place to India, especially Kolkata which creates a sense of oscillation between 'home' and 'unhomeliness' and gives a feeling of anxiety, frustration and at least makes him wish to return the land to his own native land. This kind of attitude to self and to culture gives his novels the element of oscillation between 'home' and 'unhomeliness'.

Two forms of 'unhomeliness' feeling are discernable in the novels of Amit Chaudhuri-one is from one's own self and another is from one's own culture. In an interview Chaudhuri said :

“[G]ive nothing centrality, because writing is about continually shifting weight from one thing and moment to the other.”  
[‘The Guardian’ by Chaudhuri]

In his first novel ‘A Strange and Sublime Address’ Sandeep, the twelve year old protagonist, seems to be a portrayal of Chaudhuri’s own self, who celebrates the simple joy of childhood bathing , eating, sleeping and exploring the city.

“ If one walks down street, one sees mounds of dusts like sand-dunes on the pavements, on which children and dogs sit doing nothing, while sweating labourers dig into the macadam with Spades and drills”[Chaudhuri 11].

From an organized and lonely life of a flat in Bombay (now Mumbai) [situated on the twenty third floor], the protagonist comes to spend his vacation in the household of his maternal uncle. Through his eyes the novelist shows a vast kaleidoscope backdrop and simple day to day life’s insignificant activities which reverberate his keen sense of nostalgic assails.

In his next novel ‘Afternoon Raag’ (1993), a sense of unhomeliness emerges out when the narrator physically staying in Oxford but mentally often wanders through his thoughts to his family home Mumbai and, later, to Kolkata. Often shifting his

thoughts from one place to another and seeking his own comfort, security, and identity in his own ancestral land; shake his nostalgic consciousness and homesickness. In this perspective he vacillates between the two worlds literally-on his trips back and forth, security and insecurity and the world of his native land and the world of alien land.

In his next novel 'Freedom Song' (1998), Chaudhuri pens down the decay and eventual destruction of the family business and the loss of extended family house. The loss of family house and business metaphorically represents the loss of middle class family values in modern India which shows Chaudhuri's great regional sensibility.

“When afternoon came to Vidyasagar Road, wet clothes...  
hung from a clothesline which stretched from one side to  
another on the veranda of the first floor. The line, which had  
not been tightly drawn anyway, sagged with the pressure of the  
heavy wet clothes that dripped, from sleeves and trouser ends, a  
curious grey water to the floor and, specially in the middle, one  
noticed  
the line curved downwards as if a smile were forming.”[Chaudhuri 51]

In the novella 'A New World' (2000), the protagonist Jayojit Chatterjee, an Indian born is a lecturer of economics at an American university. After the collapse of his first marriage, he comes to his native land Kolkata with his son Vikram or Bonny. This novel begins with the arrival of Jayojit and Bonny at his parents' apartment at Kolkata and ends with them on the plane from Dhaka to New York. In this sense he keeps on wandering here and there-ultimately nowhere. In this perspective he has no real home. It is said that “home as

an idea stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort. To be at home is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves”(McLeod. 200. P. 210).

Through the existential struggle and identity crisis of the protagonist in his novels, Chaudhuri presents the pangs of himself as well as Indian diasporic people who live in an alien land. He also presents their imperfect harmonies between the two geographical territories and propagates the cross cultural conflicts, isolation, nostalgia, anxiety and diasporic dilemmas in their psychological space in an extraneous land who keep searching continuously comfort, security and happiness similarly as they got in their homeland which “...is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even it is possible to visit the geographical territories that is seen as the place of origin.” (Avtar Brah 1996. P.192)

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